

Fightback

Struggle, Solidarity, Socialism



MIGRANT REFUGEE ISSUE



CONTENTS

4 New Zealand First and the
Global Far-Right
by Daphne Lawless

7 Lights in the Distance: Exile
and Refuge at the Borders of
Europe (Book Review)
by Giovanni Tiso

10 Singapore: The unseen
migrant workers behind those
skyscrapers
by Sangeetha Thanapal

14 "Workers in the most vul-
nerable parts of the economy,
they're brave": Organisation of
migrant farm workers in Austra-
lia and Aotearoa
by Ani White

17 "All the world will be affected, not just
Syria": Interview with a Syrian-Australian
artist
by Ani White

21 Community, democracy and solidarity
in doubling New Zealand's refugee quota
by Murdoch Stephens

CENTRE SPREAD: Rarohenga
by Tama tk Sharman

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EDITORIAL

In 2017, Fightback identified the fight against migrant-bashing as a key front-line of the present moment.

We committed to building a Migrant and Refugee Rights Campaign, as an intervention in the New Zealand General Election. Rather than backing any political party, we focused on the fight for internationalism across party lines, and backed an independent candidate in Wellington Central; Gayaal Iddamalgoda, a trade union lawyer (and co-coordinating editor of this issue). Gayaal beat the other independents and the ACT candidate, and gained mainstream coverage for a message challenging migrant-bashing. We also published a magazine issue on Migrant and Refugee Rights in 2017; we now offer this issue as a follow-up.

A year later, the struggle continues. New Zealand's victorious Labour government initially appeared to quietly drop their absurd policy of cutting tens of thousands of migrants. However, their coalition partner New Zealand First has more recently returned to their perennial migrant-bashing with the 'New Zealand Values' proposal (Winston and NZF are analysed by Daphne

Lawless in this issue, pp. 4-7).

Meanwhile, at the outset of 2018, Fightback committed to becoming a trans-Tasman publication (holding a successful crowdfunding campaign to meet the costs of this endeavour – thanks again to all who contributed). Many New Zealanders over the years have travelled to Australia, often seeking higher wages – including Fightback members, and most recently one of our coordinating editors. Though we are still primarily based in Aotearoa, we hope this issue's mix of content from both Aotearoa and Australia is illuminating and helps to foster trans-Tasman solidarity.

Australia continues to pursue an exceptionally xenophobic policy, with its brutal offshore concentration camps backed by both major parties. Recently, Iranian Kurdish detainee Behrouz Boochani has used surreptitious iPhones to transmit an impressive outpouring of citizen journalism, including a documentary, a number of articles, and a book. We have not reprinted Boochani's work for reasons of space and lack of permission, but we highly recommend seeking it out.

In scary times, we hope this little magazine issue offers solace and fortitude.

Ani White and Gayaal Iddamalgoda.

NEW ZEALAND FIRST AND THE GLOBAL FAR-RIGHT

By Daphne Lawless, *Fightback* (Australia/NZ)

The New Zealand First (NZF) Party was founded in 1993 by Winston Peters, formerly a cabinet minister for the mainstream conservative National Party. Since then, under Peters' continuous and unchallenged leadership, its share of the popular vote has ranged from 4 to 13% - large enough to be a significant player in all but one of New Zealand's parliaments from then until now, and to have participated in coalition governments with both of New Zealand's major parties, National and centre-left Labour. It is currently the junior partner in Jacinda Ardern's Labour-led coalition, also supported by the Green Party.

The words used to describe New Zealand First have usually been "nationalist", "populist", or – more critically – "anti-migrant" or even "racist". Ask any New Zealanders what politics Peters is usually associated with, and they will doubtless reply anti-immigrant politics, especially opposition to Chinese immigration[1]. Given that, overseas observers might scratch their heads at seeing Winston Peters as deputy Prime Minister to Ardern, whose sunnily optimistic social-democratic approach has led to her being labelled "anti-Trump"[2]. How can a political force which is usually seen as part of the same global trend as Donald Trump, UKIP, and other nationalist reactionaries and fascists be supporting the centre-left?

Some historical background on Winston Peters is probably required to understand this. New Zealand was one of the most enthusiastic adopters of Thatcher/Reagan-style neoliberal economics in the 1980s. However - unlike most countries – neo-liberalism was not at first combined with authoritarianism and social conservatism. Rather, the Labour government of 1984-90

combined privatisation, deregulation and financialization with an anti-nuclear foreign policy, the legalisation of homosexuality and steps towards reconciliation with the indigenous Māori people. In this way, they were the reverse of the previous 1975-84 National government of Robert Muldoon, which combined social conservatism and an authoritarian style with heavy Keynesian-style state intervention in the economy and trade protectionism.

During National's period in opposition 1984-1990, leaders Jim McLay and later Jim Bolger did their best to ditch Muldoon's legacy and to reform their party in the neoliberal image. In this period, Winston Peters (first elected as an MP in 1978) was seen as the leader of the remaining "Muldoonist" faction in the National Party – sceptical of neo-liberal economics, and appealing to the traditional Tory rural and suburban base. When National returned to power in 1990, and quickened the pace of the neoliberalization of the economy started by Labour, Peters was increasingly the main internal critic of this approach. After being sacked as a Cabinet Minister and told he would not be re-selected as a National candidate, he struck out on his own, promising a new party that would "put New Zealand first, second and third".

The political basis of New Zealand First has always been *anti-neoliberal and conservative traditionalist*. In an era where both major parties were committed to neoliberal reforms, anti-neoliberalism united former Labour and National voters. NZF quickly pulled significant support away from the Alliance, a broad anti-neoliberal coalition whose major members were the Green Party and a social-democratic split from Labour. I have argued in a series of articles on what I call "conservative leftism" that the perspective of forming a broad anti-neoliberal bloc during the 1990s and 2000s led the activist Left not only into building coalitions with conservative anti-neoliberals such as NZF, but to some extent intellectually capitulating to their xenophobic politics – thus opening the door

to the current far-right surge.[3]

Given all of this, what should the radical Left's attitude to New Zealand First be? Certainly Winston Peters is no friend of progressive politics. His historical animus with the Green Party – the most progressive of New Zealand's parliamentary parties - led to them being excluded from formal participation in the current coalition government.[4] His party's latest stunt is a "respecting New Zealand values" law, which "which would legally mandate new migrants to respect gender equality, "all legal sexual preferences," religious rights, and the legality of alcohol." [5]

It goes without saying that an Ardern-led coalition in which the Greens' James Shaw or Marama Davidson were Deputy Prime Minister would surely be far preferable to the current situation – if the parliamentary numbers were to work out that way. But should we be treating New Zealand First the same way that we would other right-populist, "alt-right" or neo-fascist movements? Commentator Liam Hehir argues that a consistent Left would "no-platform" Winston Peters:

Is Peters really on quite the same level as Nigel Farage? Possibly not (shared interests in Brexit and cricket notwithstanding).

But the big difference between the two is that Farage has a lot less influence over New Zealand than Peters. If you want to ensure migrants and other vulnerable groups feel welcomed and safe, the views of the second most powerful man in the country weigh more heavily than do those of the member of the European Parliament for South East England. Or they should, at least...

For Green MPs, protesting Nigel Farage achieves little but costs nothing. Protesting Winston Peters, on the other hand, might achieve something – but only at the risk of losing political power. It doesn't take

Niccolò Machiavelli to work out who gets protested.[6]

There is of course no sharp dividing line between traditionalist conservatism and the resurgent far-right, as the career of the UK's Enoch Powell should show. Peters is famous for a pugnacious, antagonistic relationship with the news media, similar to what we see from Donald Trump. His innate social conservatism led to opposition to the bill legalising same-sex marriage, in favour of a referendum on same-sex marriage – which would have no doubt led to the same extremely divisive consequences as in Australia.

However, Peters draws as much from what has been called in Britain "One Nation Conservatism" – "preservation of established institutions and traditional principles combined with political democracy, and a social and economic programme designed to benefit the common man"[7] If you asked New Zealanders who votes for New Zealand First, those who did not immediately answer "racists" would immediately answer "old people". Peters' traditionalist-conservative politics have historically appealed older New Zealanders in particular. A significant social reform that he was responsible for in a previous Labour-led government was the "Super Gold Card" guaranteeing free public transport for all over 65s.

Perhaps the best international equivalent to New Zealand First would be the Independent Greeks (ANEL), the conservative-populist party who are SYRIZA's junior coalition partner in Greece. Peters has not even been averse to using rhetoric which might be called "left-nationalist". In his speech announcing his decision to join Ardern's coalition government in 2017, he said:

Far too many New Zealanders have come to view today's capitalism, not as their friend, but as their foe.

And they are not all wrong.

That is why we believe that capitalism must regain its responsible - its human face. That perception has influenced

our negotiations.[8]

However, a “protean” (vague and shifting) populist appeal to both left and right at the same time is part of Peters’ political strategy, and also part of classical definitions of fascism[9] - so Peters’ “anti-capitalist” rhetoric doesn’t let him off the hook there.

The New Zealand far-right have traditionally seen Winston Peters much like they see Donald Trump – if not precisely “one of them”, then at least as a possible ally. The explicitly Nazi National Front named NZF as their preferred mainstream political party in their electoral propaganda in 2005[10]. More recently, during the 2017 election campaign, Peters came out in support of a “European Students Association” (a front for white-nationalist students) which had been closed down at the University of Auckland:

Winston Peters visited Victoria University in Wellington. During his speech to students he questioned the media’s role in causing the “European” group to shut down. He accused journalists of suppressing dissenting voices, and on his way out, unashamedly signed a cartoon of a frog named Pepe - the most popular symbol of the alt-right.

Peters’ actions set the New Zealand 4Chan boards alight.

“Guess who just got my vote!!” one user wrote. “Winston is based”. (Based, loosely, means good).

“Absolutely BASED,” said another. “Winnie has my undying respect.”

“Winston is /ourguy/, right?” another asked. “I want someone to get rid of the Indians and Chinese, those f***** are stealing our country right out from under us.”[11]

One obvious problem with assimilating New Zealand First to the global “alt-right”/white-nationalist phenomenon is that Winston Peters is himself Māori. The support of a bloc of conservative, rural Māori opinion has always been a vital part of the NZF coalition – as Ani White pointed out in an article

for *Fightback*[12], it is precisely rural and small-town voters who tend to be most prone to anti-migrant views. The very first NZF MP other than Peters was elected in one of the constituencies reserved for Māori electors; and at the 1996 election, NZF made a clean sweep of all the Māori seats. However, as Ani White also points out, Peters trumpets a conservative, assimilationist policy, opposing “special rights for Māori”, and has recently shifted to supporting a referendum on abolishing the Māori seats altogether.¹

Others have argued that Peters cynically uses anti-migration rhetoric in the same way that pre-Trump US Republican politics have used the issue of abortion – as a way to whip up support on the campaign trail, but having no interest in actually doing anything about the issue once in government. Political commentator Danyl Maclauchlan argues: “He campaigns on the immigration issue every election, but Peters has been in the powerbroker position in government three times now, and each of those governments has seen very high levels of net migration of what his supporters and voters consider “the wrong sort” of people.”[13]

It would be best to argue that, although Peters no doubt cynically benefits from the far-right resurgence, and has no shame in appealing to racial populism, he is essentially a conservative rather than a fascist “national revolutionary”. He seeks to bolster and defend the traditional institutions of the New Zealand colonial settler state, rather than to incite mob violence against the Establishment. Although New Zealand First has long used the rhetoric of racial populism, in practice Peters and his party are mainly concerned with getting a seat at the Establishment table, rather than raising mobs to overthrow it.

¹ Constituencies reserved for Māori electors were introduced in 1867, when the restriction of voting rights to property-owning citizens meant that many Māori were disallowed from voting, to ensure that Māori had some input regarding the makeup of parliament. Although they were intended as a temporary measure, they continue to this day, and many Māori still consider them essential to ensure representation.

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[1] New Zealand's position as a small developed Anglosphere country in the Asia-Pacific region has historically led to a tendency to "Yellow Peril" anti-Chinese politics. For a historical background, see <https://fightback.org.nz/2018/05/30/race-reaction-in-new-zealand-1880-1950/>

[2] https://www.huffingtonpost.com/entry/new-zealand-progressive-paid-leave-environment-jacinda-ardern_us_5bcd998be4b0a8f17eee3a7c

[3] See for example <https://fightback.org.nz/2016/02/15/against-conservative-leftism/>

[4] For pre-election NZF/Green polemics see https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11888053.

[5] The legality of alcohol as a New Zealand value is ironic given that in this country, as in many others, temperance societies were at the forefront of the movement for women's suffrage, and prohibitionist leader Kate Sheppard is on our \$10 bill for this reason.

[6] Why are the Woke Set not deplatforming Winston Peters, The Spinoff: <https://thespinoff.co.nz/politics/17-09-2018/why-are-the-woke-set-not-fighting-to-de-platform-winston-peters/>

[7] One-Nation Conservatism, Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/One_nation_conservatism

[8] Winston Peters wants today's capitalism to regain its human face, Stuff: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/national/politics/98084598/winston-peters-wants-todays-capitalism-to-regain-its-human-face>

[9] See for example <http://www.anesi.com/Fascism-TheUltimateDefinition.htm>

[10] National Front says it backs NZ First, NZ Herald: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10343503

[11] How NZ's growing alt right movement plans to influence the election, NZ Herald: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11888810

[12] Racial populism and the 2017 New Zealand General Election, Fightback: <https://fightback.org.nz/2017/10/20/racial-populism-and-the-2017-new-zealand-general-election/>

[13] Opinion: Whistling on migration yet leaving migration high, Newshub: <https://www.newshub.co.nz/home/politics/2018/10/opinion-whistling-on-migration-yet-leaving-migration-high-what-s-winston-peters-playing-at.html>

LIGHTS IN THE DISTANCE: EXILE AND REFUGE AT THE BORDERS OF EUROPE (BOOK REVIEW)

By Giovanni Tiso.

The successful campaign to double the New Zealand refugee quota began with an exhibition. It opened at the Pataka gallery in Porirua, in 2013, and consisted of a collection of photographs of Afghan nationals that Murdoch Stephens had recovered at an abandoned refugee detention centre in Iran. Placed within a larger exhibition on migration, the display of black and white photographs without names or any other identifying information attached was a powerful signifier of the loss of personal and collective history that the displacement of people almost always entails.

Having become the temporary custodian of this archive – which is now housed with the Afghan Centre at Kabul University – was one of the sparks that motivated Stephens to launch his campaign and articulate the demand ('double the quota') which became synonymous with it. It was by no means a radical demand: it didn't ask of the country to fundamentally alter its existing approach to refugees, but merely to expand a commitment to resettlement that was very low by international standards and had not been increased in decades. However, at a time of hardening of the borders, even such apparently modest demands can be radical in outlook and force us to look critically at our place in the world.

I thought about the collage of nameless photographs I saw at Pataka as I read *Lights in the Distance*, Daniel Trilling's new book on the European response to what most of us are liable to calling 'the refugee crisis'. Trilling suggests it might better be described as a border crisis and proceed to illustrate a system whose principal aim is to defend

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Europe's borders as opposed to protecting people's lives. Crucially, the book delves into the extraordinarily opaque and convoluted workings of this system not by means of policy analysis and journalistic reporting but rather through the first-person accounts of actual migrants.

This approach has two distinct virtues: firstly, it makes the subject matter knowable at all, since any attempt to forensically dissect the permanent and temporary measures enacted piecemeal by European nations over the last decade would defy any writer and deter all readers; secondly, and I think more importantly, it restores the personhood of the people targeted by those measures. This has an explicitly political intent. As Trilling writes, 'the starting point should be the migrants themselves, [whose] experiences are often treated as secondary to the question of what to do with them.'

Jamal, who fled Sudan as a teenager; Zainab, who left Iraq with her three children; Ousmane, who was born in Guinea, studied in Senegal and tried to find work in Mauritania; Caesar, who hails from southern Mali; Fatima from Syria, the Ahmeds from Afghanistan and several others meet on the pages of this book because of a thing they all have in common: having attempted to make a new life in Europe. But there are just as many things that set them apart. They all have distinct motivations, aspirations, social resources and networks of support. They all speak in a different voice. Trilling met them over the course of the years he spent covering the issue and travelling to its hot spots: the port town of Calais, Sicily, Greece, Bulgaria, Ukraine.

Often we encounter the same people in different countries and at different stages of their journey. Some of the stories end well. Others, not so well. Some others are still nowhere near a resolution of any kind. But it's important to take note of the things they have in common.

The first one is the constant state of existential danger. People fleeing extreme

poverty, war or persecution wishing to reach Europe are met first of all with the perils of the journey itself, be it as they attempt to cross the Sahara to get within sight of it, or as they sit in smugglers' boats which are not worthy of the name – leading to thousands of drownings every year along the route from Libya to Southern Italy alone. Almost every path is potentially deadly. A visit to the migrants' graveyard in Sidiro, Greece, bears testimony to the hundreds of people from Asia and Africa who failed to cross the Evro river to safety: some of them drowned, others froze to death during the winter months.

The danger doesn't cease once the migrant sets foot in Europe. Trilling visits the Afghan community gravitating around Saint Panteleimon Square, in Athens, during the campaign of violence carried out by Golden Dawn. The attacks followed a chilling script:

At night, when crossing the square in small groups or alone, Afghans would be approached by a child. The child would ask them where they were from. If they said, 'Afghanistan,' a group of adults standing nearby would come over and assault them. Sometimes it would be kicks and punches, other times it would be a plank of wood or a broken bottle.

People without rights, without the protection of the law – often exposed, in fact, to the random brutality of the police – must constantly work to maintain a level of basic safety that the rest of us take for granted. And this is the second thing the migrants in the book have in common: save for the occasional period of confinement in a facility, camp or actual prison, they all have to spend an enormous amount of labour in order to continue to survive, to keep moving and to retain some control over their lives, whether it is by foraging for food inside of skips, re-selling state-supplied phone cards for loose change, begging, or trying to hitch a ride on the underside of a truck. This last form of work – requiring constant vigil and the ability to evade a number of protective measures – exemplifies the utter lack of both security (in a social sense) and safety (in a physical but

also psychological sense) to which irregular migrants in Europe are subjected to. It takes Jamal four years to succeed in stowing himself under a truck and then onto a ferry from Patras to Venice. Having reached Calais, after months of failed attempts he finally gives up on his plan of ever reaching Britain. It takes the time of a ferry ride, if you are legally entitled.

This leads us to the third and most important shared experience of the characters in *Lights in the Distance*: the almost ritual erasure of identity.

The migrant who wishes to enter Europe must *become* undocumented in order to maximise his or her chances. If a false passport was secured, it will have to be jettisoned after use. If a temporary document was assigned, it will be destroyed before crossing into the next country, as will the SIM card in the migrant's phone. For the policing of the borders is also a policing of identities.

The Eurodac police database allows European countries to enforce the Dublin Regulation dictating that asylum must be sought in the country where one first entered the EU. Often, however, these are also the border countries that take the longest to process applications and offer the least welfare in the interim. Thus, the migrant who plays by that particular rule and lets their point of entry be recorded on the database may be forced into homelessness while they wait indefinitely for their 'turn' to have their application heard. In one of the most dramatic episodes recounted in the book, one of Trilling's interviewees tells him of how fellow Sudanese migrants camped outside Calais would attempt to burn off their prints by pressing their fingertips onto a red-hot iron – all to prevent detection by Eurodac.

Such literal acts of mutilation are the mirror of the demand placed on migrants to forget who they are, so we may forget that they exist. In what is perhaps the cruellest consequence of this demand, those who cross the border without documents expose themselves to the risk of having their death rendered

anonymous and go unreported among their loved ones back home. As Trilling notes, the graves in the cemetery at Sidiro are all nameless, like the photographs in the archive found by Murdoch Stephens.

There is immense political value in allowing migrants to tell their own stories and restoring the full and often staggering complexity of their experience. Think of the prohibition for the media and NGOs to speak to the prisoners at Nauru or Manus Island, and how concealing their humanity contributes to erasing their rights. And think of the effect that a single photo had, when the lifeless body of 3-year-old Alan Kurdi shook the collective conscience of Western nations more than the mass drownings that preceded it.

The historical comparisons have political value, too. *Lights in the Distance* ends in the past tense, with the story of the author's grandmother – a Jewish refugee who had first her Russian, then her German citizenship revoked between the two wars, thus was made twice stateless, undocumented by two different acts of government before finding fortuitous asylum in London on the eve of global disaster. It is a grim but instructive parallel, and a fitting conclusion for this important book.

SINGAPORE: THE UNSEEN MIGRANT WORKERS BEHIND THOSE SKYSCRAPERS

By Sangeetha Thanapal

Many migrant workers come to Singapore in the hopes of making a better life for themselves and their families back home, only to leave disheartened at the exploitative practices and abuse they undergo in the country.

Migrant workers in Singapore make up about 1.4 million of Singapore's population of 5.6 million people.² Desperate for cheap labour to build the state, Singapore has had an open-door policy for low-wage workers for decades. These workers are usually from India, Bangladesh and China and it is their labour that has built the skyscrapers which tourists love so much about Singapore.

They also live under harsh and extremely restrictive measures, and are often mistreated, overworked and underpaid. Their employers (who are overwhelmingly rich, Chinese businessmen in a country with a 77% Chinese majority) often cajole them with promises of paying later, and then resort to threats and mistreatment.

The state pays lip service to fair work, but its policies say otherwise. It rarely prosecutes employers³ who withhold the wages of their employee and does not step in to ensure safe working environments.⁴ It also unwittingly supports employers in their mistreatment, as workers who complain or take their employers to task can have their work permits cancelled. Thus, there is a serious disincentive for workers to even claim what is rightfully theirs, made worse by a system that condones their disenfranchisement.

An analysis of workers and their plight in Singapore also requires a gendered aspect. Foreign domestic workers in Singapore are

women, mostly from the Philippines and Indonesia. Their stories diverge from male construction workers but only a little. Stories of physical, mental and sexual abuse are rife.⁵ Women are locked up, overworked and underfed.⁶ Some have been offered up "for sale"⁷ and many others have resorted to suicide.⁸

It is clear that migrant work in Singapore is a form of modern day slavery⁹.

So why do neighbouring countries keep sending their workers to be treated in such abysmal ways? There seems to be a convergence of interest between rich states who desire cheap labour and poor ones who can't afford to keep many unemployed workers at home. Furthermore, a weak civil society¹⁰ within Singapore that is kept crippled by a strong state finds it hard to grapple with this problem. There is often the idea that Singaporeans themselves are economically exploited, and that needs to be the first priority for civil society. There are only two NGOs that work on behalf of migrant workers, TWC2¹¹ and HOME.¹² On a typical day, TWC2 can see up to 500 workers with different grievances.¹³ The kind of exploitation faced by these workers is too deeply endemic for two NGOs to deal with adequately, especially when faced with an apathetic government that sees these workers as dehumanised objects to be used and tossed aside.

As a state, Singapore practices a type of surveillance mechanism, where every aspect of people's lives is watched and controlled. Foreign workers are often subject to containment measures, especially dark-skinned South Asian men whose mere physical presence alone causes panic. A spatial othering occurs with these men, who are often confined to certain areas of the country. There was even an outcry at government plans to build a dormitory for these workers in a high density building estate.¹⁴ Singaporeans want migrant workers to do their 'dirty work' for them, but do not want to lay eyes on them while they

do it.

The women are subjected to a different kind of scrutiny, where their bodies are the site of medical surveillance. Work permit policies prohibit these women from becoming pregnant¹⁵ on the threat of losing their jobs and being deported. These women come to look after Singaporean families, but they cannot create any of their own. They also bear all the responsibility for avoiding pregnancy and given the strong possibility of abuse and rape as a domestic worker in Singapore, this is an undue and unjust burden placed on them.

Historically, the Singapore state has practiced a form of eugenics,¹⁶ where poor women's children are deemed simply not good enough for the state. The policies aimed at controlling the bodies of domestic workers are an extension of that. Unwanted children from unwanted women is transgressive: the state only desires certain types of bodies to procreate, despite a concern for the falling birth rate.¹⁷

Workers in Singapore in general have few rights and migrant workers face a predominance of abusive work situations with little recourse or avenue for recompense. As the Singapore government refuses to see them as human beings who deserve a safe environment to work in, this state of affairs seems likely to continue in times to come.

² Migrant workers struggle to get paid, CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/24/asia/singapore-migrant-workers-intl/index.html>

³ More errant workers should be prosecuted, Today: <https://www.todayonline.com/voices/more-errant-employers-should-be-prosecuted-not-paying-salaries>

⁴ Migrant workers' cases in Singapore more shocking than in Hong Kong, South China Morning Post: <https://www.scmp.com/news/hong-kong/law-crime/article/2076082/cases-involving-migrant-workers-more-shocking-singapore>

⁵ 6 out of 10 maids in Singapore are exploited, Channel NewsAsia: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/6-out-of-10-maids-in-singapore-are-exploited-survey-9454694>

⁶ Singapore couple jailed for starving Philipino maid, BBC: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-39402698>

⁷ Singapore ads for Indonesian maids for sale ignites anger, Rappler: <https://www.rappler.com/world/regions/asia-pacific/212335-anger-over-singapore-ads-offering-indonesian-maids-for-sale>

⁸ Maid commits suicide after being locked up for three days straight, The Independent: <http://theindependent.sg/maid-commits-suicide-after-being-locked-up-for-three-months-straight/>

⁹ Migrant workers in Singapore "vulnerable to forced labour", TWC: <http://twc2.org.sg/2017/07/14/migrant-workers-in-singapore-vulnerable-to-forced-labor-including-debt-bondage-says-us-tip-2017-report/>

¹⁰ Singapore's constrained civil society, BBE: <http://www.b-b-e.de/fileadmin/inhalte/aktuelles/2016/02/enl-2-ortmann-gastbeitrag.pdf>

¹¹ TWC2: <http://twc2.org.sg/>

¹² HOME: <https://www.home.org.sg/>

¹³ Migrant workers struggle to get paid, CNN: <https://edition.cnn.com/2018/02/24/asia/singapore-migrant-workers-intl/index.html>

¹⁴ Serangoon Gardens Dormitory Saga, Progress in GP: <https://progressgp.wordpress.com/2009/07/19/serangoon-gardens-dormitory-saga/>

¹⁵ Maids fear losing jobs when they get pregnant, The Straits Times: <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/maids-fear-losing-job-when-they-get-pregnant>

¹⁶ Population planning in Singapore, Wikipedia: https://en.m.wikipedia.org/wiki/Population_planning_in_Singapore

¹⁷ Singapore's fertility rate at new seven-year low, Channel NewsAsia: <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/news/singapore/singapore-total-fertility-rate-new-low-1-16-10002558>

"RAROHENGA"

is a lino print that pays tribute to Mase, who was and remains a dearly loved elder in the trans/queer community in Narm (Melbourne) Australia...Mase visited tama in the spirit of Ruru when he died And when ruru appeared he was accompanied by a critical mass bike rally and 2 waiata, Culture Club - Karma Chameleon and Dr G Yunupingu - Bāpa

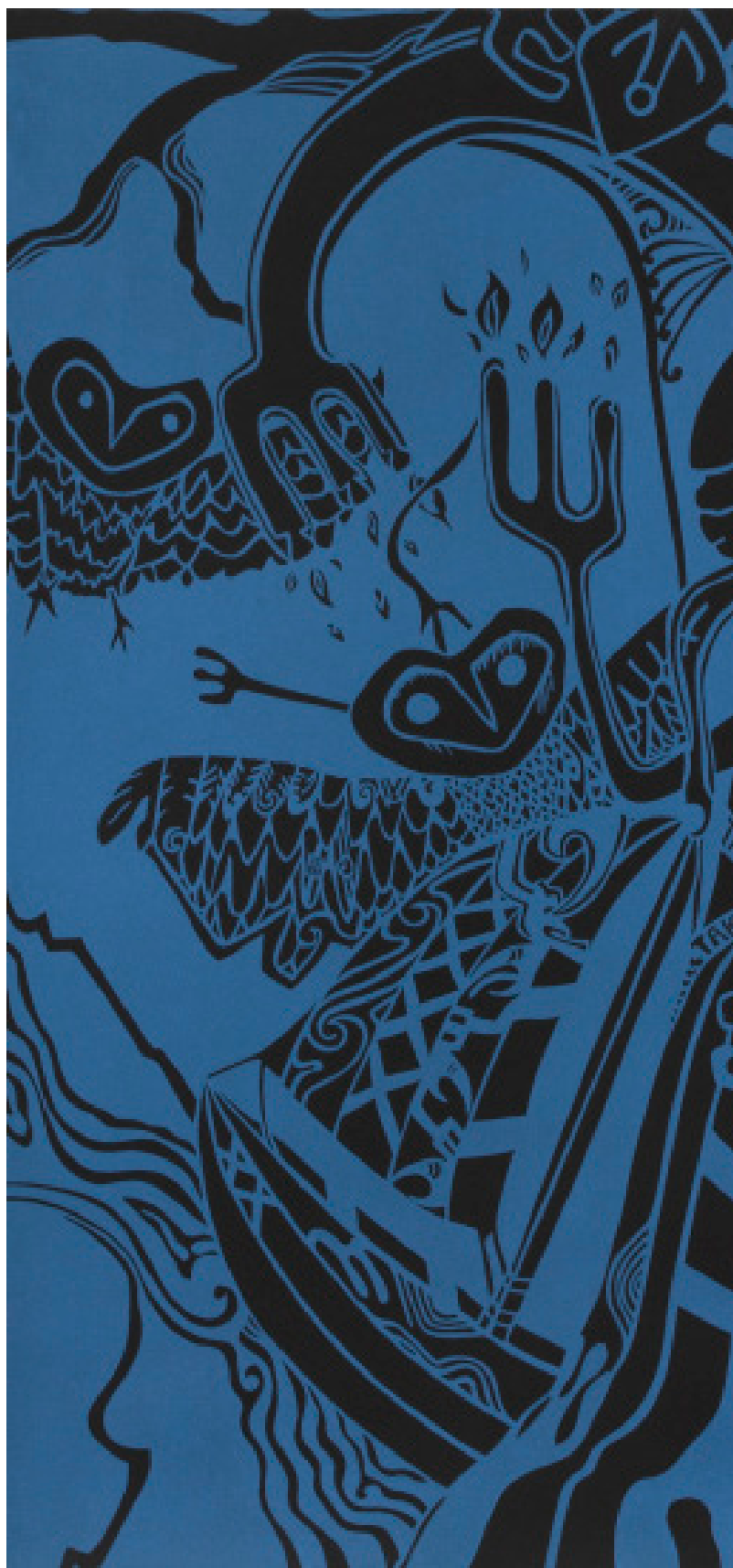
Tama lives works on the stolen land of the Wurundjeri people

I acknowledge the Wurundjeri people of the Kulin nations as the Traditional Owners of the land on which i live and work, and pay my respect to their Elders both past, present and emerging. Sovereignty was never ceded, and the processes of colonisation, occupation, incarceration and genocide that began over two centuries ago continue to this day.

www.tamatkfavell.com

tama_couture

'Rarohenga' – Lino on paper, 2013.
76x106cm. Tama tk Sharman





“WORKERS IN THE MOST VULNERABLE PART OF THE ECONOMY, THEY’RE BRAVE”: ORGANISATION OF MIGRANT FARM WORKERS IN AUSTRALIA AND AOTEAROA

By Ani White.

It’s an open secret that the conditions faced by migrant farm workers in Australia and Aotearoa/New Zealand are dire.

In Aotearoa, a study conducted by Sue Bradford for FIRST Union and the Union Network of Migrant Workers (UNEMIG), released on UNEMIG’s fifth anniversary in August 2017, found evidence of dire exploitation of Filipino migrants in the dairy farm industry. The study interviewed 27 Filipino workers, three local workers, and one dairy farm manager. Health and safety precautions were practically nonexistent:

One farm worker said he wasn’t given a helmet to ride around on a motorbike and another said that for two years, he was made to ride a bike that didn’t have lights or brakes.

Another respondent said he was not provided proper training or wet weather gear, and had to pay \$700 from his own pocket to buy one.¹

This abuse is not limited to Filipino dairy workers. More than half of the Bay of Plenty’s kiwifruit employers audited in 2017 did not meet basic employment standards, as highlighted by FIRST Union when it launched its new Kiwifruit Workers Alliance.² Ni-Vanuatu workers in Marlborough’s vineyard sector approached *Stuff* anonymously with reports of underpayment.³ Migrant worker

abuse in Aotearoa extends throughout many industries, as found in a 2016 study interviewing more than 100 migrant workers, the first independent evidence-based study of its kind.⁴

In Australia, a *Four Corners* study into migrant farm work uncovered similar shocking conditions. Workers were paid as little as \$3.95 an hour, worked shifts as long as 22 hours, and reported performing sexual favours to extend their visas, among numerous other abuses.⁵ Moreover, law-abiding farmers were priced out of the market. This shows that the brutality of the industry is not simply a matter of individual bad farmers, but compulsions of capital that must be resisted collectively.

Fortunately, FIRST Union in Aotearoa and the National Union Workers (NUW) in Australia have both taken up the organisation of migrant farm workers.

Mandeep Singh Bela, an organiser for FIRST Union and the coordinator of UNEMIG, says that working in isolated environments and having a lack of access to information about their rights is a major factor in migrant workers’ abuse. “Being a migrant myself in this country since 2009, I worked in the kiwifruit industry, and I’ve been in a similar boat, where I was paid below minimum wage entitlements, I was exploited, didn’t know where to go for help.” Bela moved on to work at Pak N Save, where FIRST is active, and became active in the union. To address the isolation and lack of information for migrant workers, FIRST and UNEMIG have now released a Migrant Workers’ Rights

contractor underpaid them, *Stuff*: <https://www.stuff.co.nz/business/90410800/nivanuatu-rse-workers-and-marlborough-vineyard-contractor-embroiled-in-contract-dispute>

⁴ Uncovered: Exploitation of migrant workers rife in NZ, *NZ Herald*: https://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=11766210

⁵ Four Corners investigation reveals exploitation and slave-like conditions on farms supplying Aussie supermarkets, *News.com.au*: <https://www.news.com.au/finance/work/at-work/four-corners-investigation-reveals-exploitation-and-slave-like-conditions-on-farms-supplying-aussie-supermarkets/news-story/e3264dc44240a65308c226c80e67bb7a>

¹ Report: Filipino dairy farm workers abused, *NZ Herald*: http://www2.nzherald.co.nz/the-country/news/article.cfm?c_id=16&objectid=11907236

² Exploitation of Kiwifruit workers is rife, *Radio NZ*: <https://www.radionz.co.nz/news/business/357040/exploitation-of-kiwifruit-workers-is-rife-union>

³ Ni-Vanuatu workers say Marlborough vineyard

Passport(MWRP), which contains information on employment rights for migrants, collective agreements, and legal and mental health support services. The booklet will act as a work guide and vital connection point for migrants so they can safely work in Aotearoa. Tim Nelthorpe, a national organiser with the NUW farm organising team, explains that the NUW has been organising in the horticulture sector for three years (Nelthorpe adds that while FIRST has been organising in the sector for even less time, the NUW has been impressed with their work rapidly winning over “hearts and minds”). One major cue was when members of the NUW, previously employed by poultry suppliers, moved into horticulture and reported shocking conditions, asking the union to take this issue up.

“We’re a supply chain union so we’re the union for the warehouse,” Nelthorpe explains. “The missing part of the supply chain should be in our union, and our members want those workers to be paid properly.” Aotearoa’s FIRST Union is similarly a supply-chain union with many members in supermarkets and warehouses.

Organisation at multiple points in the supply chain allows the NUW to place pressure at one point, for results at another point. Members who were worker-shareholders at Coles and Woolworths were able to place shareholder pressure in support of farm workers. “When they mess with our farm workers they mess with our supermarket workers as well,” Nelthorpe adds.

Horticulture workers have also taken industrial action on a range of issues, often independently of the union. Nelthorpe explains how a recently recruited delegate was able to build a culture of strike actions around a health & safety issue: “Whenever those chemicals came in to be sprayed he walked into the middle of the packed shed and say ‘right: OUT!’ And the whole workforce would walk out. In a highly organised CFMEU [Australian construction workers union] site that’s probably not

unusual, but in a new industry, it just shows you that it’s inherent in people, they just need a supportive structure and they can do the rest.”

Nelthorpe explains that the lawlessness of the industry can go both ways. “Think of it like the jungle. In the jungle where there’s no laws, people take industrial action, and employers take industrial action too, so employers will sack all workers and cash contractors in a day, the employers will call Immigration on their own workforce, but at the same time, workers in the most vulnerable part of the economy, the undocumented workers, they’re brave, they’ll walk off a job, they’ll do a go slow, they’ll rock up to their contractor’s house demanding money, because they have to.”

Through militant action, NUW members have won a number of victories. Firstly, the NUW managed to smash cash contracting in South-East Melbourne and Northern Adelaide. Workers on some sites have made an impressive leap from \$12 an hour to \$22 an hour. Delegate structures are consolidating. Nelthorpe says the NUW is on the cusp of winning casual over-time in the industry and is also focused on challenging piece rates.

Nelthorpe says there are three major factors that enable abuse in the horticulture industry. Firstly, the award system; while Australia has a system of industry awards setting minimum wages and conditions, horticulture has the worst award of any industry, for example not requiring overtime pay. Secondly and thirdly, the interlinked issues of cash contracting and insecure working visas. “Cash contractors in the most seasonal industries, say grapes, strawberries, asparagus, stone fruit citrus, they control the point of entry into the industry to the point that if you want to work in a lot of the sites you have to stay in the contractor’s house, you have to use the contractor’s transport, you have to use the contractor’s preferred unlicensed migration agent to get your visa made,” Nelthorpe explains. “That means that it’s very hard for people who feel bonded to break away from

that without really taking serious risks.” In Aotearoa, the Regional Seasonal Employer (RSE) scheme similarly keeps migrant workers insecure, along with other bonded working visas.

Nelthorpe is sharply critical of unionists who push a ‘local jobs for local workers’ line. Excluding migrants from the union movement is self-defeating, because “there’s 1.8 million temporary migrant workers in Australia, which is 10 percent of the workforce, and union density has gone through the floor.”

“Workers should be able to go where ever they want to go. Capital can flow so workers should be able to flow as well. And unions should be able to adapt to that and support any worker that wants to join a union.”

Crucially, standing for migrant worker rights allows unions to set minimum standards, rather than letting the abuse of a vulnerable workforce drive down conditions for all. “So there’s the self-interest element, but also these are the workers that are picking and packing the food that we eat. And every person has a responsibility to make sure people are treated with respect.”

Despite wages and conditions in the industry being dire by Australian standards, wages are still often better than in migrant workers’ origin countries. For that reason among others, wages matter, but aren’t the main issue driving organisation in the industry. “Respect is the deeper issue, and being able to have a voice at work.” explains Nelthorpe.

Organising in an industry with an international workforce also has distinct aspects. Organising must be multilingual, with materials in the first language of members, and a multilingual organising team. Members also bring the political concerns of their communities to the union. Nelthorpe recalls a 2017 NUW mobilisation against genocide in Myanmar. “Our Rohingya membership in Melbourne were looking to do something in solidarity with their community, and so they turned to the union cause they’ve got no-one else really, and we helped them organise a rally in Collins Street

in the city, and to be honest it was the most powerful inspiring rally I’ve ever been to.”

“About 200 members of the community mobilised, you had NUW flags, the night before the rally we worked with the group at the Trades Hall studio, they made all their own banners, made their own blood-splattered or red paint splattered clothing, and it was just an outpouring of grief for the community. When you think about what a union can be, sometimes we get caught in this narrow wages and conditions prison, and we get caught in the workplace level, but a union’s much more than that, and for these workers, the union was the vehicle through which they could express their grief and anger at what’s happening to their people. That community will always love the union because of that experience, and when they’ve got nowhere else to turn, they turn to the union. So since that rally we’ve had a number of refugee rallies, at which members and organisers of the union have spoken, and they connect the struggle of the union with the struggle against Mandatory Detention, the struggle against a backward racist immigration system, there’s massive opportunities there to break the racial stereotypes, the racial language that’s used to denigrate refugees in this country.”

In Aotearoa, FIRST Union members and organisers also take action on international political issues. In 2007, current FIRST Union president Dennis Maga faced potential arrest in his home country of the Philippines for protesting against the president’s visit, a threat that was averted.⁶ FIRST’s mobilisation against repression in the Philippines continues to this day,⁷ alongside the more recent organisation of migrant farm workers. FIRST in Aotearoa and NUW in Australia show that migrants’ issues are workers’ issues.

⁶ Filipino Unionist fears for his life, Scoop: <http://www.scoop.co.nz/stories/PO0705/S00563.htm>

⁷ Auckland-Philippines solidarity in 2017: A retrospective, Auckland Philippines Solidarity: <https://filipinosolidarity.wordpress.com/2017/12/31/auckland-philippines-solidarity-in-2017-a-retrospect/>



“ALL THE WORLD WILL BE AFFECTED, NOT JUST SYRIA”: INTERVIEW WITH A SYRIAN AUSTRALIAN ARTIST

Image: Artwork by Miream Salameh

Ani White interviews Miream Salameh, a Syrian artist living in Melbourne.

First of all, can you tell us why you were forced to seek refuge and how this happened?

At the beginning of the revolution, I worked with a group of my friends to create a magazine against the tyrannical regime that ruled Syria for fifty years. This regime is represented by the Assad family, which seized power in a military coup by Hafez al-Assad.

Our aim in founding this magazine was to present our ideas, the goals and principles

of our revolution and our dream of building a new free, civil and democratic Syria. All of us should be equal under the law that achieves equality and justice for all. The aim was also to document the crimes of the Assad regime and its violations of international law - which is still under the eyes of the entire international community - against all those who have participated in this revolution and supported it even with a word.

But after six months we were forced to stop it after we were attacked by the Assadist forces. I remember very well how in the second raid we miraculously survived the inevitable deaths by field execution that Assad carried out at every raid. I lost two of my friends in that brutal way; during a raid on Deir Baalba in Homs in the first year of the revolution, the Assad gangs shot my friend Hatem Mohammad, who was an artist too, directly in his head and heart. His relatives could not take the body until fifteen days after Assad's forces left the area - or face being arrested or dying under torture in his prisons. On this day we were three friends in the house watching a video that I filmed in a

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region loyal to Assad in Homs to document the crimes of Assad and his regime. In this video I documented the stolen property that Assad's regime and its intelligence and army were selling at the lowest prices in a market they call the Sunni market; they rob those areas whose people were shelled and forced to flee, then the Assad regime enters and steals, and sometimes do not just do that, they also burn some houses. One person shown in the video told how when they left these areas with cars full of stolen stuff, the army at the checkpoints took the LCD screens and laptops and left them the rest of the stuff to sell in the Sunni market.

Going back to the raid day, as we watched the video and handed over the caricatures, Assad's forces began to besiege the neighbourhood and prepared to raid it. I quickly went out with my friends who took me out of the neighbourhood and then returned to document what would happen. Assad's forces committed an outrageous massacre, killing 20 people and arresting many, including women, who were stripped naked in public, and arrested them. Assad's forces destroyed all our things and stole all that was valuable. During that time I received many threats and warnings, and was forced to leave for Lebanon without informing anyone. But death threats, arrests and rape will continue if I try to go back to my country. During my stay in Lebanon, one week after my arrival in Australia, I was attacked along with my friends by Hezbollah and they attempted to kidnap me. But we were rescued with the help of two Lebanese gendarmes and three Syrian people who were there by chance and brought us home safely. I don't know if I would be alive now otherwise. Then we came here on a humanitarian visa.

How did the Syrian revolution begin? What were the demands of the revolution?

The Syrian revolution began after students at a school in Daraa wrote anti-Assad slogans on the walls of their schools. So the Assad regime arrested and tortured them and this angered their parents who went to claim and demand the release of their children, but the security forces told them: forget your children and make others, and if you cannot, send us your women to do so. People in Daraa began to take to the streets and demand the release of their children and all those detained in Assad's prisons. These demonstrations moved to the rest of the

Syrian cities, one of these was my city Homs. Our demands were initially to reform the regime, release the detainees and abolish the state of emergency, but the regime did not respond to these demands and tried to suppress the demonstrations in a brutal way, from firing live bullets at the demonstrators to firing missiles, and using internationally prohibited weapons such as cluster bombs. They carried out campaigns of detention against all those suspected of joining the revolution or supporting it even with a word, but the more violence the regime inflicted, the more the demonstrations grew to overthrow this bloody regime and build a free democratic civil state in which we all live equally under a law that protects the freedom and dignity of the individual - not a law that is amended to suit the regime's interests, the way they did when Hafez al-Assad died, and they amended the constitution within three minutes to let Bashar take power after his dead father.

Who is primarily responsible for the atrocities (and the political crisis) in Syria?

All the responsibility for war crimes is with the regime of Assad, no one else, all the destruction and half a million refugees at home and abroad, and large numbers of detainees and abductees. The Assad regime committed all of this and was responsible for it with the help of his Russian and Iranian allies, as well as ISIS, al-Qaeda and the Nusra Front. I include ISIS and al-Qaeda in this because Assad assisted them in entering Syria and put them in the areas to be a pretext for him to bombard and control and create displacement of their people. No-one benefits from their presence as much as Assad. In addition to al-Qaeda, Assad is the one who released the extremists and criminals from his prisons at the beginning of the revolution, for the same reasons that I mentioned earlier and to make it seem like our revolution is Islamist in form. Thus he has a strong argument before world public opinion to eliminate the revolution. Assad is the one who released Zahran Alloush [leader of the Jaysh al-Islam armed faction] who used people as shields and put them on the roofs of houses to prevent Assad from shelling them. He is no different from the Assad regime and is similar in criminality. All these Assad did to justify the war crimes he committed against unarmed civilians, bombarding them in their schools and homes, hospitals and markets using

internationally banned weapons including phosphorus, chemical and others.

We all saw the massacre committed against our people in as-Suwayda city at the hands of ISIS. But we all know who brought them on buses from Yarmouk camp to the east of as-Suwayda to control the area there. This claim comes from the people of as-Suwayda who knew Assad's games and put all the responsibility for what happened there on the Assad regime. And some of them said that the kidnappers all were Da'esh [ISIS], in fact they were detainees in the prisons of the regime.

The Assad regime is the one who made our land an area of international conflicts between America, Russia and others. There is so much evidence that the only man responsible for what happened to my country is Assad.

How do you respond to claims that Assad protects Christians and minorities?

Assad did not protect the minorities but protected himself by using them. The Assad regime did not show mercy to any of its opponents, neither the Christian nor the Druze, nor even the Alawites, who are the sect he belongs to. He arrested and killed a lot under torture and displaced them. Also he killed people who were from his own sect and loyalists at the beginning of the revolution to claim that it was the rebels who killed them, and to lie to them that our revolution was an Islamic revolution aimed at killing all the minorities. I remember once sitting in al-Arman area, one of them told me: We shelled three buildings here in al-Arman. I asked him why he did that. He said because we want to make the people here believe that the revolutionaries did it and that their revolution is an Islamic revolution. I told him, but what about the children, women and residents of these buildings who were hit by these missiles? He said: It does not matter, the important thing is to believe what we want and fight alongside the regime. The regime has done a lot of these dirty tricks.

I am from the Christian minority in Syria and from a village called Marmarita, a Christian village in Wadi al-Nasara. I was forced to flee my country after I received many threats just because I stood against this criminal regime and participated in the revolution. Many young people in my village were arrested for the same reason, and after their release they immediately left the country. The artist and my teacher Wael Qustoun, who is from my village and was

based in Homs, was arrested by the Assad intelligence and tortured to death because of his refusal to paint a helmet for the army. None of his family members knew of his fate until someone saw his body in the hospital with 200 other bodies. That person called the Wael family to take his body before they took him with the rest, to bury them in mass graves without informing anyone about their fate or what happened to them inside the prison. They forced his family to say that the unknown armed groups were the ones who kidnapped Wael and killed him. This what happened to me and my family and people really close to me. There are many, many more stories that anyone can learn, like the story of Marcel Chahrour, Basil Shehadeh and many others. They deny the claims that Assad protects minorities.

What role have international actors played in Syria, particularly the USA and Russia?

I am not a political analyst, but everyone who follows the Syrian situation is fully aware that no one cared about the death and displacement of the Syrian people. The Russians, the Iranians and Hezbollah participate with Assad in his war crimes against defenceless people. This applies to America and even to Australia, when they participated in the bombing under the pretext of eliminating terrorism.

We all know that all of them took part in this for their own interests, so that they don't care about Assad himself and were ready to get rid of him when they were done with him. Even the Turks themselves, who some believe they are friends of the Syrian people, killed many Syrians as they crossed the border to escape the bombing to Turkey.

America has bombed many military sites and bases of Assad: but it is known to the free Syrian people that it is not because it cares about the Syrian people, especially after Trump's decision to prevent Syrians from entering America. This applies to everyone.

After almost seven years, we no longer trust anyone, not even the United Nations and the international community, who could not prevent Assad from committing his own massacres, especially forced displacement and ethnic cleansing against the people, which is an international war crime under UN resolutions. Instead of stopping that, they were working to find safe passages to Syrians leave their homes and neighbourhoods. That is, Assad committed this crime under their auspices, and they

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came in after that and set up tents for us in neighbouring countries.

Can you explain what Assad and Putin's assault on Idlib means for Syrian politics?

It's crushing one of the last areas held by the revolutionaries. The same will happen as happened in Aleppo, Darya and Ghouta - massacres of people. Idlib has refugees from those areas that have already been assaulted. So three million people will be attacked. Assad is ethnically cleansing, which is a war crime. It will not relieve things for us, and also Turkey will face a huge wave of refugees. And many refugees will go by boat to reach Europe. All the world will be affected if this happens to Idlib, not just Syria.

And Turkey made a deal with Russia, to pursue a political resolution, not because Turkey cares about the people and want to save lives, I think Turkey just wants to save their country and not have to deal with refugees. And we all know what Russia and Assad want from Idlib, they want all of the territory in regime hands.

How do you respond to claims that the revolution is simply sectarian?

How can the revolution be sectarian? It includes all people from different religious backgrounds. There are the Druze, the Christian, the Alawi, the Sunni, and all of us have a dream of building a free and democratic Syria that is equal to everyone under the law. But what we talked about previously, about the release of the extremists by Assad and giving ISIS entry to our country, in addition to the media, which also played a big role in the painting of our revolution as Islamist. Not just this, but also it tried to show that there was no revolution at the start; when the media mention the Syrian situation they only mention civil war and never mentioned the Syrian revolution. But after seven years of the Assad regime, trying to crush our revolution in the most brutal ways, and the hypocrisy of the big powers and the international community and the United Nations closing their eyes to the crimes of Assad against us, the demonstrations in Idlib embarrass them all showing that the revolution is not dead, and did not die, and will not die.

During the revolution, its activists whose work was characterized by civil action were targeted by all the extremist parties represented by ISIS, al-Qaeda and the Assad regime. Naji Al-Jarf was targeted by

ISIS who shot at him in Turkey, and Jaysh al-Islam kidnapped Razan Zaytouneh and her comrades, whose fate we do not yet know, and many more who were targeted by ISIS and al-Qaeda. And we don't need to mention what the Assad regime did and still does to all of the activists of the revolution, because it is clear and obvious to all of us. All these criminals share one interest: to eliminate the revolution because they know that the victory of the revolution means the end of all of them.

What bearing does understanding the political situation in Syria have on refugee solidarity in Australia?

When we started leaving Syria in the first year of the revolution, the government badmouthed refugees. I don't think the government cares about refugees. I remember there was one guy who was in the detention centre in Syria, and the Australian government deported him back to Syria, and the Syrian government arrested him there for 28 days, and they bombed his area and killed his father. If I went back to Syria, they would arrest me.

You've said Australia has a discriminatory refugee policy in how it ranks Syrians. Can you explain that?

Australia gave priority in granting asylum to Christian asylum seekers, ignoring the many refugees who had been stranded in the refugee camps for almost 7 years without any basic necessities of life, and that leads these people to risk their lives and the lives of their children at sea. Those who survived the drowning were detained in the detention centers of Nauru and Manus Island. In these prisons, there are families - women and children held for four years - and many more. Can you imagine children being forced to spend their childhood in such places, after they survived inevitable death in their country, for no reason?

In Australia, the boats were stopped under the pretext of preserving people's lives. But if they really cared, they would offer an alternative to getting in unsafe boats, and offer a real solution to their suffering, like granting a humanitarian visa, easing restrictions on humanitarian visas. Humanitarian visas should be based on the conditions that people are in, not based on needing sponsors. Also Australia has bombed my country and made more

refugees. If they really cared, they would not participate in the bombing.

What do you think about the protests against Trump's bombings?

It's funny how people get angry about this bombing, when the US has been bombing my country since 2014, and killing many civilians, yet people only protest when he bombs an Assad military base, killing nobody, and announcing it in advance so that Assad could evacuate. Listen to Syrians before you try to do something for us.

Do Syrian refugees (practically speaking) have the right to return?

The right of refugees to return will not happen until something changes in our country. They need to stop the ethnic cleansing. Assad remains in power. They need to address these things, before they talk about our return to Syria. It will not be possible to return while the regime stays in power. And in terms of ISIS and al-Qaeda, as long as the regime stays in power these problems will continue. First Assad needs to be taken out of power, then we need to address the sectarianism, then we can rebuild our country.

What can people in Australia or Aotearoa do to support Syrians?

We have to listen to Syrians, convey the truth of what's going on, stand together as people and pressure the government here, and the rest of the world's governments. My country, especially the media, is politicised. We must exert great pressure on the international community and the United Nations to do their work honestly, in protecting the human rights for which they were founded.

I believe that only people have the power to change for a better world. I believe that this will be the first serious step to stand with the Syrian people in their revolution and end their ordeal.

COMMUNITY, DEMOCRACY AND SOLIDARITY IN DOUBLING NEW ZEALAND'S REFUGEE QUOTA

Launched in 2013, the campaign to double New Zealand's refugee quota – after three decades of stagnation – went from a radical ask to a mainstream success. In this article, the campaign's founder Murdoch Stephens discusses the way that community support and solidarity led to the campaign's success.

Today, the double the quota campaign is at a rare moment for campaigners: reflecting on a hard-earned success. I review the troughs as well as the peaks, wonder at how things might have been otherwise and take pleasure in the way that a wide arc of civil society solidified around the singular ask to do more for refugees.

As I speak to others and read mainstream media representations of the campaign's success I come to see two general explanations. The first explanation draws from the discourse of politics as intrigue and heroic struggle. This approach explains the increase with reference to the savvy, even heroism, of political leaders and campaigners. In this explanation, change is achieved by a combination of moral fortitude and individual doggedness. This view of political change is singular and acute.

The second explanation comes from the opposite vantage, locating success in a plurality of actors and forces. Civil society and community are foregrounded. While the first explanation offers an easy trajectory for how change comes about, the second is less direct. Change is posited as the result of either spontaneity, coincidence, luck, or a kind of tectonic build up that is eventually unleashed. If the first explanation leans too heavily on the agency of individuals, the second succumbs to a kind of unknowable, almost mystical, fatalism: the view is so diffuse that it offers nothing beyond platitudes of community empowerment.

Both of these go-to explanations simplify the five years of campaigning into a narrative that places too little emphasis on the specific organisations – of which, roughly, there was a dozen – and individuals that rallied members and associates towards this end. These organisations were civil

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society – such as Amnesty International and ActionStation; religious – the Anglican church, and Quakers Peace Service; anarchist – Peace Action Wellington; social-good businesses – Lush cosmetics and Scoop News; and community service providers and already resettled refugee representatives – groups like the Red Cross and ChangeMakers Refugee Forum, both of whom had to be more cautious of how public support for the campaign might impact on their funding.

Alongside these groups were a similar number of individuals who offered regional organising or economic support to the campaign. These people were drawn into the campaign by pre-existing friendships, our extensive use of Twitter and Facebook and by about forty opinion articles written for almost every major newspaper and website in the country. To name and enumerate what all of these individuals and organisations did and how we came together would take a book. Hence, the recently published *Doing Our Bit: the Campaign to Double the Refugee Quota*. In lieu of summarising that, I want to focus on a couple of moments of community solidarity from the first third of the campaign when doubling the quota was most often seen as a radical ask.

The first point to note is that community support was the means, but not the end of the campaign. The double the quota campaign was what we came to call a pressure campaign. That means that we tried to make the most acute pressure as possible on decision makers at a specific time. Compare the pressure campaign to a social change campaign which, if it were focussed on refugees, might be geared towards something like changing the New Zealand public's attitudes towards refugees. In the pressure campaign, we had a very specific goal and it was very obvious who had the authority to make it happen. Social change campaigns don't have such tidy or measurable ends. The benefit of the pressure campaign is that it doesn't require massive budgets for television ads, nationwide pamphleteering or strategic lawsuits.

The pressure campaign focussed on the Immigration Minister and then the Prime Minister. We aimed at three pressure points: two elections and one scheduled triennial review of the refugee quota. These specific time periods focussed the campaign on moments where we could proactively pressure the government. This might all sound obvious, but compared to the vague

way I began the campaign with the ideas of putting up posters and holding protests, it was all very strategic.

Despite this focus on the decision makers, we still needed to show them that the campaign had broad support. People in the tech-world speak of social proof. The concept suggests there is a threshold that organisations and campaigns need to surpass in order to have further followers feel that they're a part of a movement that is growing. The start of our campaign focussed on a raft of measures of social proof: a thousand Facebook likes, five-hundred Twitter followers, five articles or press releases centred on or from our organisation. The assumption is that these are the metrics that people first consider and judge us on when noting the campaign, rather than the validity of the ask. In pop-psychology this approach might be described as the first-follower concept. The enthusiasm of the campaigner is less important than the enthusiasm of the first person to understand the campaign and to give their support to it.

To achieve our metrics of social proof I contacted pretty much all of my personal acquaintances and explained the campaign to them asking them how they would help on a scale of one to five. Three's would commit to sharing five posts in the next six months. Four would do that, plus some on the ground assistance in organising. Five would be available to assist in a more collaborative, open-ended manner. This filtering and volunteering secured our first community support on terms each person was comfortable with, on a time-frame that they decided.

I came to see first supporters as a finite resource, but one that met the needs of social proof so we could move to the next level of reaching out to other organisations. In early 2015, Amnesty International were the first organisation to join us in the call to double the quota. They made it their focus of campaigning for the next eighteen months. As the refugee crisis became acute in Syria and surrounding countries, more organisations adopted the call to double the quota, and the campaign ask became an acceptable, mainstream position.

The notion of community support changed as we started to see stories appear in the media which we had not seeded or suggested and which didn't mention us. How is a volunteer-run organisation supposed to exist alongside organisations with decades of experience

and a four million dollar budget? One answer came through discussions with Amnesty – we had no reputation and so no one could say, ‘ugh, not bloody that lot again’. Nor were we restrained by the need to have good relationships with political parties into the future. We could say the radical things they could not.

Organisations with budgets also operate through a hierarchy – social media posts and press would have to be discussed and agreed on, while I could churn ours out in the minutes after news breaks. We, like most activist-led campaigns, were nimble. But we were also friendly. As with Elias Canetti’s *Crowds and Power* the perception of a growing crowd of supporters was enough to buoy all organisations instead of each closing ranks and asserting themselves based on an identity as outsiders, originators or any other antagonism that would make one more legitimate than another.

The second aspect of community I want to gesture towards involves a caution about democratic logics. The tensions in New Zealand politics about migration can be usefully analysed through Chantal Mouffe’s disambiguation of the oft-hyphenated term liberal-democracy.

When considered alone, most on the left saw the justice inherent in our campaign. But once the austerities of neo-liberalism were factored into people’s view of the social terrain, we heard a constant refrain to sort out ‘our own’ problems first. While the logic of the refugee as a problem or a cost without end¹ to be borne is riven with blind spots, I want to dive a little deeper into arguments of us and them. Mouffe describes the need of *democracies* to constitute themselves by an included and an excluded – the demos who can decide how they are ruled and the outside who have no say.

In contrast, it is the *liberal* logic of human rights without exclusions that propels the commitment to refugee protection. And yet to enact this universal right, campaigners need to work with the included group of a democracy. Central to that task has been convincing those in the democracy that liberal values are essential to the democracy’s internal functioning. As Mouffe notes, this intertwining of liberalism and democracy have been the compelling urges

last hundred years.

In recent years, the privileging of the economic side of liberalism – read *neo-liberalism* – has undermined people’s faith in the pairing of liberalism and democracy, including the social forms of liberalism like human rights. And so we see the urge to tightly define who is a part of the democracy and nation, as blaming outsiders for the ills of speculative investment and high finance.

In the New Zealand case, there is a community memory of anti-racist work that is doing well to challenge the desiccating of democracy. While some people are seduced by the virile patriotism of putting New Zealanders as numero uno, many more understand that the exclusion of new migrants and refugees would never be the end of exclusions. If new refugees and migrants were excluded, then next would be migrants who are already citizens, then others who aren’t quite Kiwi enough for the steaming mess of ethno-nationalists.

We saw this most acutely in the way that some of the several hundred thousands supporters of ActionStation responded to the campaign to double the quota. Most specifically, a not insignificant number of the tens of thousands drawn to the campaigning organisation around the notion of TPPA and sovereignty were horrified that the government would increase the refugee quota.

The irony in much of these discussions on outsiders and inclusion is that it is those communities in New Zealand, and countries around the world, where there are the fewest refugees that are most able to let their fantasies of the refugee and conspiracy run wild. It is much harder to see migrants and refugees as barbaric hordes or plants from the UN when they merge into the banality of everyday life.

of most Western democracies for at least the

¹ See my article ‘Refugees without end forever and ever and ever’ in *Fair Borders? Migration in the Twenty-First Century*, ed David Hall, Bridget Williams Books, 2017, Wellington.

ABOUT FIGHTBACK

Fightback is a trans-Tasman socialist media project with a magazine, a website, and other platforms. We believe that a structural analysis is vital in the task of winning a world of equality and plenty for all. Capitalism, our current socio-economic system, is not only exploiting people and planet – but is designed to operate this way. Therefore we advocate a total break with the current system to be replaced by one designed and run collectively based on principles of freedom, mutual aid, and social need.

OUR 10-POINT PROGRAMME

Fightback stands for the following core programme, and for building institutions of grassroots power in the working class and oppressed groups to bring them about:

1. **Constitutional transformation** based on indigenous self-determination and workers power. Indigenous and worker co-ops to operate as guardians over public resources.
2. **Secure, appropriate and meaningful work** for those who want it, with a shorter working week. The benefit system to be supplemented with a Universal Basic Income, removal of punitive sanctions.
3. **International working-class solidarity.** Close the Detention Centres. Open borders to Australia and Aotearoa, full rights for migrant workers. Recognise Pasefika rights to self-determination, Australia and Aotearoa to contribute to a 'no-strings' development fund for Pacific nations. Opposition to all imperialist ventures and alliances; neither Washington nor Moscow.
4. **No revolution without women's liberation.** Full funding for appropriate, community-driven abuse prevention and survivor support, free access to all reproductive technologies, public responsibility for childcare and other reproductive work. The right to full, safe expression of sexuality and gender identity.
5. **An ecosocialist solution** to climate change. End fossil fuel extraction, expand green technology and public transport, and radically restructure industrial food production.
6. **Freedom of information.** End corporate copyright policies in favour of creative commons. Public support for all media technologies, expansion of affordable broadband internet to the whole country. An end to government spying.
7. **Abolish prisons,** replace with restorative justice and rehabilitation.
8. **Universal right to housing.** Expansion of high-density, high-quality public housing, strict price controls on privately owned houses. Targeted support to end involuntary homelessness.
9. **Fully-funded healthcare** at every level. Move towards health system based on informed consent, remove inequities in accident compensation, opposition to "top-down" efforts to change working people's behaviour.
10. **Fully-funded education** at every level, run by staff and students. Funding for all forms of education and research, enshrining indigenous knowledge as a core part of the curriculum.

More detail on this programme is available in our pamphlet What is Fightback?